



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

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Fact Sheet

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VA Programs for Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an ailment resulting from exposure to an extreme stress involving direct or indirect threat of death, serious injury or a physical threat. The trauma may be experienced alone, as in rape or assault, or in the company of others, as in military combat.

The events that can cause PTSD are called "stressors." They include natural disasters (floods, earthquakes), accidents (car accidents, airplane crashes, large fires) or deliberate man-made disasters (bombing, torture, death camps).

Symptoms include recurrent thoughts of a traumatic event, reduced involvement in work or outside interests, hyper alertness, anxiety and irritability. The disorder apparently is more severe and longer lasting when the stress is of human design.

More than 185,000 veterans were listed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 2003 as having PTSD as a service-connected disability.

Vet Centers

VA readjustment counseling is provided through 206 community-based Vet Centers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam. Vet Centers are located outside of medical facilities, often in shopping malls and other community settings.

The Vet Center mission features a mix of direct counseling and help accessing other programs, such as psychological counseling for veterans exposed to war trauma or who were sexually assaulted during military service, family counseling, community outreach and education, and extensive social services and referral activities to help veterans improve their social and economic prospects after the military.

Vet Centers are staffed by interdisciplinary teams that include psychologists, nurses and social workers. Vet Center teams reflect ethnic and gender diversity and include many veterans, most having served in a combat theater of operations.

Eligibility for Vet Center services includes all Vietnam theater veterans, other Vietnam era veterans who accessed Vet Center care prior to January 1, 2004, and any other veteran who served in any war, armed conflict or peace keeping mission. Eligibility for

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sexual trauma counseling at Vet Centers is open to any veteran regardless of period of service.

In 2003, Vet Centers saw approximately 130,000 veterans and provided over 990,000 visits to veterans and family members. For many veterans who would not otherwise receive VA assistance, the Vet Centers make more than 100,000 referrals a year to VA medical facilities and another 120,000 referrals annually to VA regional offices for disability compensation, pensions or other benefits. For the third consecutive year, 99 percent of veterans using Vet Centers reported being satisfied with services received.

VA Medical Center Programs

VA operates an internationally recognized network of more than 140 specialized programs for the treatment of PTSD through its medical centers and clinics. One notable program consists of PTSD clinical teams that provide outpatient treatment, working closely with other VA treatment programs, including Vet Centers and the community. In 2003, more than 77,800 veterans were treated for PTSD by VA specialists.

In addition to 97 PTSD clinical teams, VA operates five specialized inpatient units around the country, plus three brief-treatment units, 14 residential rehabilitation programs, and seven PTSD day hospitals. There also are five outpatient Women's Stress Disorder and Treatment Teams. A special focus in the program has included underserved and minority populations, such as African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans. A specialized PTSD inpatient treatment unit serves women veterans at the Palo Alto, Calif., VA Medical Center's Menlo Park Division.

The Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act (Public Law 106-117) re-established the Under Secretary of Health's Special Committee on PTSD. The committee will assess VA's capacity to diagnose and treat PTSD and provide guidance on VA's education, research and benefits activities with regard to PTSD.

National PTSD Center

VA established the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in 1989, with a mandate to promote research into the causes and diagnosis of the disorder, to train health care and related personnel in diagnosis and treatment, and to serve as an information resource for professionals across the United States and, eventually, around the world. The center consists of seven divisions with distinct, but complementary responsibilities: behavioral science, women's health sciences, clinical neurosciences, education, evaluation, pacific islands ethnocultural, and executive and resource center divisions.

The center is committed to approaching PTSD through a focus on research, education and consultation. These three threads weave the Center's work together in a way that brings science into practice and ensures that clinical concerns guide

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scientific priorities. The National Center has come to be viewed as a world leader in PTSD research. Current research at the center includes large-scale clinical trials, as well as studies on the epidemiology, diagnosis, psychobiology and treatment of PTSD.

Among its many educational programs, the center provides regular satellite broadcasts and publishes two newsletters, which highlight the latest developments in research and clinical practices for PTSD. The National Center also offers a monthly 5-day clinical training program free of charge to VA staff, and maintains a nationally recognized Web site (<http://www.ncptsd.org>) with information about trauma and PTSD. The Web site includes documents such as the Iraq War Clinician Guide to help clinicians diagnose and treat veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom, and a bibliographic database of more than 21,000 articles. The National Center also provides consultation to clinicians, scientists and policy makers concerning treatment, research and education regarding PTSD.

Veterans Being Compensated for PTSD

Period	Sept. 04	Sept. 99
Pre-WWII	3	1
WWII	25,061	15,879
Korea	10,016	5,412
Vietnam	161,028	90,695
Gulf War	13,524	5,592
Peacetime	8,261	4,491
Total	217,893	122,070

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